



VINTAGE

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# RATLINES

STUART NEVILLE

## **Contents**

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Stuart Neville

Dedication

Title Page

Epigraph

Part I: Soldier

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

## Part II: Résistant

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31

Chapter 32

Chapter 33

Chapter 34

Chapter 35

Chapter 36

Chapter 37

Chapter 38

Chapter 39

Chapter 40

Chapter 41

Chapter 42

Chapter 43

Chapter 44

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

### Part III: Collaborator

Chapter 48

Chapter 49

Chapter 50

Chapter 51

Chapter 52

Chapter 53

Chapter 54

Chapter 55

Chapter 56

Chapter 57

Chapter 58

Chapter 59

Chapter 60

Chapter 61

Chapter 62

Chapter 63

Chapter 64

Chapter 65

Chapter 66

Chapter 67

Chapter 68

Chapter 69

Chapter 70

Chapter 71

Chapter 72

Chapter 73

Chapter 74

Chapter 75

Epilogue

Author's Note

Acknowledgements

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## About the Book

*“Right at the end of the war, some Nazis saw it coming. They knew that even if they escaped, hundreds of others wouldn’t. They needed to set up routes, channels, ways out for their friends. Ratlines.”*

Ireland, 1963. As the Irish people prepare to welcome President John F. Kennedy to the land of his ancestors, a German is murdered in a seaside guesthouse. He is the third foreign national to die within a few days, and Minister for Justice Charles Haughey is desperate to protect a shameful secret: the dead men were all former Nazis granted asylum by the Irish government.

A note from the killers is found on the corpse, addressed to Colonel Otto Skorzeny, Hitler’s favourite WWII commando, once called the most dangerous man in Europe. It says simply: ‘We are coming for you. Await our call.’

Lieutenant Albert Ryan, Directorate of Intelligence, is ordered to investigate the crimes. But as he infiltrates Ireland’s secret network of former Nazis and collaborators, Ryan must choose between country and conscience. Why must he protect the very people he fought against twenty years before? And who are the killers seeking revenge for the horrors of the Second World War?

## About the Author

Stuart Neville's first novel, *The Twelve*, was one of the most critically acclaimed crime debuts of recent years. It was selected as one of the top crime novels of the year by the *New York Times* and it won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for best thriller. His next novels, *Collusion* and *Stolen Souls*, garnered widespread praise and confirmed his position as one of the most exciting new crime authors writing today.

[www.stuartneville.com](http://www.stuartneville.com)

Also by Stuart Neville

The Twelve  
Collusion  
Stolen Souls



For Isabel Emerald Neville

# Ratlines

Stuart Neville



*Harvill Secker*  
LONDON

*War-battered dogs are we,  
Gnawing a naked bone,  
Fighting in every land and clime,  
For every cause but our own.*

*President John F. Kennedy  
Wexford, Ireland, 27 June 1963*

I

SOLDIER

# 1

'YOU DON'T LOOK like a Jew,' Helmut Krauss said to the man reflected in the windowpane.

Beyond the glass, rolling white waves threw themselves against the rocks of Galway Bay, the Atlantic glowering beyond. The guesthouse in Salthill was basic, but clean. The small seaside town outside Galway City hosted families from all over Ireland seeking a few days of salt air and sunshine during the summer months. Sometimes it provided beds for unmarried couples, fornicators and adulterers with the nerve to bluff their way past the morally upright proprietors of such establishments.

Krauss knew so because he had enjoyed the company of several ladies in guesthouses like this one, taking bracing walks along the seafront, enduring overcooked meals in mostly empty dining rooms, then finally rattling the headboard of whatever bed they had taken. He carried a selection of wedding rings in his pocket, alongside the prophylactics.

This dreary island, more grey than green, so choked by the godly, provided him few pleasures. So why not enjoy the odd sordid excursion with a needful woman?

Perhaps Krauss should have allowed himself the luxury of a decent hotel in the city, but a funeral, even if for a close friend, did not seem a fitting occasion. The security might have been better, though, and this visitor might not have gained entry so easily. For a moment, Krauss felt an aching regret, but immediately dismissed it as foolishness. Had he been the kind of man who submitted to regret, he would have hanged himself ten years ago.

'Are you a Jew?' Krauss asked.

The reflection shifted. 'Maybe. Maybe not.'

'I saw you at the funeral,' Krauss said. 'It was a beautiful service.'

'Very,' the reflection said. 'You wept.'

'He was a good man,' Krauss said. He watched gulls skate the updraughts.

'He was a murderer of women and children,' the reflection said. 'Like you.'

'Murderer,' Krauss said. 'Your accent is British. For many people in Ireland, you British are murderers. Oppressors. Imperialists.'

The reflection swelled on the glass as the man approached. 'You hide your accent well.'

'I enjoy the spoken word. To a fault, perhaps, but I spend time refining and practising my speech. Besides, a German accent still draws attention, even in Ireland. They shelter me, but not all make me welcome. Some cling to their British overmasters like a child too old for the teat.'

Krauss had felt the weight of his age more frequently in recent times. His thick black hair had greyed, the sculpted features turned cragged. The veins in his nose had begun to rupture with the vodka and wine. Women no longer stared at him with hungry eyes when he took his afternoon walks through Dublin's Ringsend Park. But he still had good years ahead of him, however few. Would this man steal them from him?

'Have you come to kill me too?' he asked.

'Maybe. Maybe not,' the reflection said.

'May I take a drink, perhaps smoke a cigarette?'

'You may.'

Krauss turned to him. A man of middle age, between forty and forty-five, old enough to have served in the war. He had looked younger across the cemetery, dressed in the overalls of a gravedigger, but proximity showed the lines on his forehead and around his eyes. Sand-coloured hair strayed

beneath the woollen cap on his head. He held a pistol, a Browning fitted with a suppressor, aimed squarely at Krauss's chest. It shook.

'Would you care for a small vodka?' Krauss asked. 'Perhaps it will steady your nerve.'

The man considered for a few seconds. 'All right,' he said.

Krauss went to the nightstand where a bottle of imported vodka and a tea-making set waited next to that morning's *Irish Times*. The front page carried a headline about the forthcoming visit of President John F. Kennedy, a story concerning a request by the Northern Irish government that he should venture across the border during his days on the island. The Irish worshipped the American leader because he was one of theirs, however many generations removed, and anticipation of his arrival had reached the point of near hysteria. Krauss intended to avoid all radio and television broadcasts for the duration of Kennedy's stay.

Not that it mattered now.

Krauss turned two white teacups over and poured a generous shot into each. He went to soften one with water from a jug, but the man spoke.

'No water, thank you.'

Krauss smiled as he handed a cup to the man. 'No glasses, I'm afraid. I hope you don't mind.'

The man nodded his thanks as he took the cup with his left hand. Undiluted vodka spilled over the lip. He took a sip and coughed.

Krauss reached into the breast pocket of his best black suit. The man's knuckle whitened beneath the trigger guard. Krauss slowed the movement of his hand and produced a gold cigarette case. He opened it, and extended it to the man.

'No, thank you.' The man did not flinch at the engraved swastika as Krauss had hoped. Perhaps he wasn't a Jew, just some zealous Briton.

Krauss took a Peter Stuyvesant, his only concession to Americanism, and gripped it between his lips as he snapped the case closed and returned it to his pocket. He preferred Marlboro, but they were too difficult to come by in this country. He took the matching lighter from his trouser pocket and sucked the petrol taste from its flame. The set had been a Christmas gift from Wilhelm Frick. Krauss treasured it. Blue smoke billowed between the men.

‘Please sit,’ Krauss said, indicating the chair in the corner. He lowered himself onto the bed and drew deeply on the cigarette, letting the heat fill his throat and chest. ‘May I know your name?’ he asked.

‘You may not,’ the man said.

‘All right. So why?’

The man took another sip, grimaced at the taste, and placed the cup on the windowsill to his left. ‘Why what?’

‘Why kill me?’

‘I haven’t decided if I’ll kill you or not, yet. I want to ask a few questions first.’

Krauss sighed and leaned back against the headboard, crossing his legs on the lumpy mattress. ‘Very well.’

‘Who was the well-dressed Irishman you spoke with?’

‘An insultingly junior civil servant,’ Krauss said.

Eoin Tomalty had given Krauss’s hand a firm shake after the ceremony. ‘The minister sends his condolences,’ Tomalty had said. ‘I’m sure you’ll understand why he was unable to attend in person.’

Krauss had smiled and nodded, yes, of course he understood.

‘A civil servant?’ the man asked. ‘The government actually sent a representative?’

‘A matter of courtesy.’

‘Who were the others there?’

‘You already know,’ Krauss said. ‘You know me, so you must know them.’

‘Tell me anyway.’



Krauss rhymed them off. 'Célestin Lainé, Albert Luykx, and Caoimhín Murtagh representing the IRA.'

'The IRA?'

'They are fools,' Krauss said. 'Yokels pretending to be soldiers. They still believe they can free Ireland from you British. But they are useful fools, so we avail of their assistance from time to time.'

'Such as arranging funerals.'

'Indeed.'

The man leaned forward. 'Where was Skorzeny?'

Krauss laughed. 'Otto Skorzeny does not waste his precious time with common men like me. He is far too busy attending society parties in Dublin, or entertaining politicians at that damn farm of his.'

The man reached inside his jacket pocket and produced a sealed envelope. 'You will pass this message to him.'

'I'm sorry,' Krauss said. 'I cannot.'

'You will.'

'Young man, you misunderstand me,' Krauss said. He downed the rest of the vodka and placed the cup back on the bedside table. 'I admit to being verbose at times, it is a failing of mine, but I believe I was clear on this. I did not say "I will not". I said "I cannot". I have no access to Otto Skorzeny, not socially, not politically. You'd do better going to one of the Irish politicians that gather to his flame.'

The man got to his feet, approached the bed, keeping the Browning's aim level. With his free hand, he opened Krauss's jacket and stuffed the envelope down into the breast pocket.

'Don't worry. He'll get it.'

Krauss felt his bowel loosen. He drew hard on the cigarette, burning it down to the filter before stubbing it out in the ashtray that sat on the bedside locker.

The man's hand steadied.

Krauss sat upright, swung his legs off the bed, and rested his feet on the floor. He straightened his back and placed his

hands on his knees.

Fixing his gaze on the horizon beyond the window, Krauss said, 'I have money. Not much, but some. It would have been enough to see out my days. You can have it. All of it. I will flee. The rain in this damn place makes my joints ache anyway.'

The Browning's suppressor nudged his temple.

'It's not that simple,' the man said.

Krauss hauled himself to his feet. The man stood back, the pistol ready.

'Yes it is,' Krauss said, his voice wavering as he fought the tears. 'It *is* that simple. I am nothing. I was a desk clerk. I signed papers, stamped forms, and got piles from sitting on a wooden chair in the dark and the damp.'

The man pressed the muzzle against the centre of Krauss's forehead. 'Those papers you signed. You slaughtered thousands with a pen. Maybe that's how you live with it, tell yourself it was just a job, but you knew where—'

Krauss swiped at the pistol, grabbed it, forced it down, throwing the other man's balance. The man regained his footing, hardened his stance. His countenance held its calm, only the bunching of his jaw muscles betraying his resistance.

Sweat prickled Krauss's skin and pressure built in his head. He hissed through his teeth as he tried to loosen the man's fingers. The man raised the weapon, his strength rendering Krauss's effort meaningless. Their noses almost touched. Krauss roared, saw the wet points of spittle he sprayed on the man's face.

He heard a crack, felt a punch to his stomach, followed by wet heat spreading across his abdomen. His legs turned to water, and he released his hold on the barrel. He crumpled to his knees. His hands clutched his belly, red seeping between his fingers.

Hot metal pressed against Krauss's temple.

'It's better than you deserve,' the man said.  
If he'd had the time, Helmut Krauss would have said, 'I know.'

## 2

ALBERT RYAN WAITED with the director, Ciaran Fitzpatrick, in the outer office, facing the secretary as she read a magazine. The chairs were creaky and thin-cushioned. Ryan endured while Fitzpatrick fidgeted. Almost an hour had passed since Ryan had met the director in the courtyard surrounded by the grand complex of buildings on Upper Merrion Street. The northern and southern wings were occupied by various government departments, and the Royal College of Science resided beneath the dome that reached skyward on the western side of the quadrangle. Ryan had expected to be ushered into the minister's presence upon arrival, and by the look of him, so had Fitzpatrick.

Ryan had left his quarters at Gormanston Camp as the sky lightened, turning from a deep bluish grey to a milky white as he walked the short distance to the train station. Two horses grazed in the field across from the platform, their bellies sagging, their coats matted with neglect. They nickered to each other, the sound carrying on the salt breeze. The Irish Sea stretched out beyond like a black marble table.

The train had arrived late. It filled slowly with tobacco smoke and slack-faced men as it neared Dublin, stopping at every point of civilisation along the way. Almost all of the passengers wore suits, whether dressed for their day's work in some government office, or wearing their Sunday best for a visit to the city.

Ryan also wore a suit, and he always enjoyed the occasion to do so. A meeting with the Minister for Justice certainly warranted the effort. He had walked south from Westland

Row Station to Merrion Street and watched the director's face as he approached. Fitzpatrick had examined him from head to toe before nodding his begrudging approval.

'Inside,' he'd said. 'We don't want to be late.'

Now Ryan checked his watch again. The minute hand ticked over to the hour.

He'd heard the stories about the minister. A politician with boundless ambition and the balls to back it up. The upstart had even married the boss's daughter, become son-in-law to the Taoiseach, Ireland's prime minister. Some called him a shining star in the cabinet, a reformist kicking at the doors of the establishment; others dismissed him as a shyster on the make. Everyone reckoned him a chancer.

The door opened, and Charles J. Haughey entered.

'Sorry for keeping you waiting, lads,' he said as Fitzpatrick stood. 'It was sort of a late breakfast. Come on through.'

'Coffee, Minister?' the secretary asked.

'Christ, yes.'

Ryan got to his feet and followed Haughey and Fitzpatrick into the minister's office. Once inside, Haughey shook the director's hand.

'Is this our man Lieutenant Ryan?' he asked.

'Yes, Minister,' Fitzpatrick said.

Haughey extended his hand towards Ryan. 'Jesus, you're a big fella, aren't you? I'm told you did a good job against those IRA bastards last year. Broke the fuckers' backs, I heard.'

Ryan shook his hand, felt the hard grip, the assertion of dominance. Haughey stood taller than his height should have allowed, and broad, his dark hair slicked back until his head looked like that of a hawk, his eyes hunting weakness. He had only a couple of years' seniority over Ryan, but his manner suggested an older, worldlier man, not a young buck with a higher office than his age should merit.

'I did my best, Minister,' Ryan said.

It had been a long operation, men spending nights dug into ditches, watching farmers come and go, noting the visitors, sometimes following them. The Irish Republican Army's Border Campaign had died in 1959, its back broken long ago, but Ryan had been tasked with making sure its corpse remained cold and still.

'Good,' Haughey said. 'Sit down, both of you.'

They took their places in leather-upholstered chairs facing the desk. Haughey went to a filing cabinet, whistled as he fished keys from his pocket, unlocked a drawer, and extracted a file. He tossed it on the desk's leather surface and sat in his own chair. It swivelled with no hint of creak or squeak.

An Irish tricolour hung in the corner, a copy of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on the wall, along with pictures of racehorses, lean and proud.

'Who made your suit?' Haughey asked.

Ryan sat silent for a few seconds before he realised the question had been spoken in his direction. He cleared his throat and said, 'The tailor in my home town.'

'And where's that?'

'Carrickmacree.'

'Jesus.' Haughey snorted. 'What's your father, a pig farmer?'

'A retailer,' Ryan said.

'A shopkeeper?'

'Yes,' Ryan said.

Haughey's smile split his face, giving his mouth the appearance of a lizard's, his tongue wet and shining behind his teeth.

'Well, get yourself something decent. A man should have a good suit. You can't be walking around government offices with the arse hanging out of your trousers, can you?'

Ryan did not reply.

'You'll want to know why you're here,' Haughey said.

'Yes, Minister.'

‘Did the director tell you anything?’

‘No, Minister.’

‘Proper order,’ Haughey said. ‘He can tell you now.’

Fitzpatrick went to speak, but the secretary bustled in, a tray in her hands. The men remained silent while she poured coffee from the pot. Ryan refused a cup.

When she’d gone, Fitzpatrick cleared his throat and turned in his seat. ‘The body of a German national was found in a guesthouse in Salthill yesterday morning by the owner. It’s believed he died the previous day from gunshot wounds to the stomach and head. The Garda Síochána were called to the scene, but when the body’s identity was established, the matter was referred to the Department of Justice, and then to my office.’

‘Who was he?’ Ryan asked.

‘Here, he was Heinrich Kohl, a small businessman, nothing more. He handled escrow for various import and export companies. A middleman.’

‘You say “Here”,’ Ryan said. ‘Meaning elsewhere, he was something different.’

‘Elsewhere, he was SS-Hauptsturmführer Helmut Krauss of the Main SS Economic and Administrative Department. That sounds rather more impressive than it was in reality. I believe he was some sort of office worker during the Emergency.’

Government bureaucrats seldom called it the war, as if to do so would somehow dignify the conflict that had ravaged Europe.

‘A Nazi,’ Ryan said.

‘If you want to use such terms, then yes.’

‘May I ask, why aren’t the Galway Garda Síochána dealing with this? It sounds like a murder case. The war ended eighteen years ago. This is a civilian crime.’

Haughey and Fitzpatrick exchanged a glance.

‘Krauss is the third foreign national to have been murdered within a fortnight,’ the director said. ‘Alex

Renders, a Flemish Belgian, and Johan Hambro, a Norwegian. Both of them were nationalists who found themselves aligned with the Reich when Germany occupied their respective countries.'

'And you assume the killings are connected?' Ryan asked.

'All three men were shot at close range. All three men were involved to some extent in nationalist movements during the Emergency. It's hard not to reach the logical conclusion.'

'Why were these men in Ireland?'

'Renders and Hambro were refugees following the liberation of their countries by the Allies. Ireland has always been welcoming to those who flee persecution.'

'And Krauss?'

Fitzpatrick went to speak, but Haughey interrupted.

'This case has been taken out of the Guards' hands as a matter of sensitivity. These people were guests in our country, and there are others like them, but we don't wish to draw attention to their presence here. Not now. This is an important year for Ireland. The President of the United States will visit these shores in just a few weeks. For the first time in the existence of this republic, a head of state will make an official visit, and not just any head of state. The bloody leader of the free world, no less. Not only that, he'll be coming home, to the land of his ancestors. The whole planet will be watching us.'

Haughey's chest seemed to swell as he spoke, as if he were addressing some rally in his constituency.

'Like the director said, these men were refugees, and this state offered them asylum. But even so, some people, for whatever reason, might take exception to men like Helmut Krauss living next door. They might make a fuss about it, the kind of fuss we could be doing without while we're getting ready for President Kennedy to arrive. There's people in America, people on his own staff, saying coming here's a waste of time when he's got Castro in his backyard, and the



blacks causing a ruckus. They're advising him to cancel his visit. They get a sniff of trouble, they'll start insisting on it. So it's vital that this be dealt with quietly. Out of the public gaze, as it were. That's where you come in. I want you to get to the bottom of this. Make it stop.'

'And if I don't wish to accept the assignment?'

Haughey's eyes narrowed. 'I must not have made myself clear, Lieutenant. I'm not asking you to investigate this crime. I'm ordering you.'

'With all due respect, Minister, you don't have the authority to order me to do anything.'

Haughey stood, his face reddening. 'Now hold on, big fella, just who the fuck do you think you're talking to?'

Fitzpatrick raised his hands, palms up and out. 'I'm sorry, Minister, all Lieutenant Ryan means is that such an order should come from within the command structure of the Directorate of Intelligence. I'm sure he meant no disrespect.'

'He better not have,' Haughey said, lowering himself back into his chair. 'If he needs an order from you, then go on and give it.'

Fitzpatrick turned back to Ryan. 'As the minister said, this is not a voluntary assignment. You will be at his disposal until the matter is resolved.'

'All right,' Ryan said. 'Are there any suspects in the killings?'

'Not as yet,' Haughey said. 'But the obvious train of thought must be Jews.'

Ryan shifted in his seat. 'Minister?'

'Jewish extremists,' Haughey said. 'Zionists out for revenge, I'd say. That will be your first line of inquiry.'

Ryan considered arguing, decided against it. 'Yes, Minister.'

'The Guards will give assistance where needed,' the director said. 'We'd prefer that be avoided, of course. The fewer people involved in this the better. You will also have

the use of a car, and a room at Buswells Hotel when you're in the city.'

'Thank you, sir.'

Haughey opened the file he had taken from the cabinet. 'There's one more thing you should be aware of.'

He lifted an envelope from the file, gripping it by its corner. One end of it was a deep brownish red. Ryan took the envelope, careful to avoid the stained portion. It had been cut open along the top edge. He turned the envelope to read the words typed on its face.

Otto Skorzeny.

Ryan said the name aloud.

'You've heard of him?' Haughey asked.

'Of course,' Ryan said, remembering images of the scarred face in the society pages of the newspapers. Any soldier versed in commando tactics knew of Skorzeny. The name was spoken with reverence in military circles, regardless of the Austrian's affiliations. Officers marvelled at Skorzeny's exploits as if recounting the plot of an adventure novel. The rescue of Mussolini from the mountaintop hotel that served as his prison stirred most conversation. The daring of it, the audacity, landing gliders on the Gran Sasso cliff edge and sweeping Il Duce away on the wind.

Ryan slipped his fingers into the envelope and extracted the sheet of paper, unfolded it. The red stain formed angel patterns across the fabric of the page. He read the typewritten words.

*SS-Obersturmbannführer Skorzeny,  
We are coming for you.  
Await our call.*

'Has Skorzeny seen this?' Ryan asked.

Fitzpatrick said, 'Colonel Skorzeny has been made aware of the message.'

'Colonel Skorzeny and I will be attending a function in Malahide in a few days,' Haughey said. 'You will report to us there with your findings. The director will give you the details. Understood?'

'Yes, Minister.'

'Grand.' Haughey stood. He paused. 'My tailor,' he said, tearing a sheet from a notepad. He scribbled a name, address and phone number. 'Lawrence McClelland on Capel Street. Go and see him, have him fit you up with something. Tell him to put it on my account. Can't be putting you in front of a man like Otto Skorzeny wearing a suit like that.'

Ryan dropped the bloody envelope on the desk and took the details from Haughey. He kept his face expressionless. 'Thank you, Minister,' he said.

Fitzpatrick ushered Ryan to the door. As they were about to exit, Haughey called, 'Is it true what I heard? That you fought for the Brits during the Emergency?'

Ryan stopped. 'Yes, Minister.'

Haughey let his gaze travel from Ryan's shoes to his face in one long distasteful stare. 'Sort of young, weren't you?'

'I lied about my age.'

'Hmm. I suppose that would explain your lack of judgement.'

### 3

THE SUN HUNG low in the sky by the time Ryan drove into Salthill. His buttocks ached from the journey. Cutting west across the country, he'd paused outside Athlone to relieve his bladder by the roadside. On three occasions he had to stop and wait while a farmer herded cattle from one field to another. He saw fewer cars as he travelled further from Dublin, driving miles at a time without seeing anything more advanced than a tractor or a horse and cart.

He parked the Vauxhall Victor in the small courtyard adjoining the guesthouse. Fitzpatrick had handed him the keys along with a roll of pound and ten shilling notes, telling him not to go mad on it.

Ryan climbed out of the car and walked around to the entrance. A hardy wind carried salt spray up from the rocks. He tasted it on his lips. Gulls called and circled. Their excrement dotted the low wall that fronted the house.

The sign above the door read ST AGNES GUEST HOUSE, PROPRIETRESS MRS J. D. TOAL. He rang the bell and waited.

A white form appeared behind the frosted glass, and a woman called, 'Who's there?'

'My name is Albert Ryan,' he said. 'I'm investigating the crime that occurred here.'

'Are you with the Guards?'

'Not quite,' he said.

The door cracked open, and she peeked out at him. 'If you're not the Guards, then who are you?'

Ryan took his wallet from his pocket and held up the identification card.

'I'll need my glasses,' she said.

'I'm from the Directorate of Intelligence.'

'The what?'

'Like the Guards,' he said. 'But I work for the government. Are you Mrs Toal?'

'Yes,' she said. She looked back to the card. 'I can't read that. I need to find my glasses.'

'Can I come in while you look for them?'

She hesitated, then closed the door. Ryan heard a chain slide back. She opened the door and allowed him to enter.

'I don't mean to be rude,' she said as he followed her into the dim hallway. 'It's just I've been plagued with all sorts of people since the news got out. Newspapermen, mostly, and others who just want to see if the body's still here. Monsters, all of them. Ah, here we are.'

She lifted her spectacles from a table and perched them on her nose. 'Let me see that again.'

Ryan handed her the card. She studied it, reading every word, before handing it back.

'I've already told the Guards everything I know. I'm not sure I can tell you anything different.'

'Maybe not,' Ryan said. 'But I'd like to speak with you anyway.'

He looked into the room to his left where a middle-aged couple and a young priest took their leisure. The lady read a paperback book, while the gentleman smoked a pipe. The priest studied the racing pages of the *Irish Times*, marking the listings with a stubby pencil. Mrs Toal reached in and pulled the door closed.

'I'd rather you didn't disturb my guests,' she said.

'I won't. Perhaps I could take a look at the room where the body was found. Then maybe we could have a chat.'

She turned her gaze to the stairs, as if some terrible creature listened from the floors above. 'I suppose.'

Mrs Toal went ahead. Old photographs of Salthill and Galway City hung on the walls alongside prints of Christ and

the Virgin, and what appeared to be family portraits of generations past.

'It's a shocking thing,' she said, her breath shortening as she climbed. 'He seemed a nice enough man. Why someone would want to do that to him, I really don't know. He may have been a foreigner, but that doesn't account for it. And there's me all booked out for next month, all them people coming in to see President Kennedy when he visits - they're landing the helicopters just up the road, you know - and now I've got blood all over my carpet. I'll have to do that room top to bottom. How can I expect anyone to stay in there with blood on the carpet? Here we are.'

She stopped at a door bearing the number six and fished a ring of keys from a pocket in her skirt. 'I'll not go in with you, if you don't mind,' she said as she turned the key in the lock.

'That's fine,' Ryan said.

He put his fingers to the handle, but Mrs Toal seized his wrist.

'I'll tell you one thing,' she said, her voice dropping low. 'There was drink taken. I found a bottle on the bedside locker. I don't know what sort of drink it was, but they'd been at it when it happened.'

'Is that right?' Ryan asked.

'Oh, it is. And he wouldn't be the first man to meet his death when drink was taken. I know. My husband was one of them. He died right outside my front door. He had a bellyful of whiskey and porter one night, then he fell on those rocks out there. Split his head open and drowned when the tide came in.'

'I'm very sorry to hear that,' Ryan said, meaning it. 'I'll come and find you when I'm finished here.'

'All right, so.' She nodded and went to the stairs. 'Call me if you need anything.'

Alone, Ryan turned the handle and entered the room.